

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

General Metal Works Corp.

Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Revenues Grow, Quality Increases for General MetalWorks with ISO 9001 and WMEP

Client Profile:

General MetalWorks is a full-service metal fabricator located in Mequon, Wisconsin. The woman-owned company manufactures shelves, tanks, cabinets and other parts for various industries. General MetalWorks employs 50 people.

Situation:

General MetalWorks, like many metal fabrication shops, had not documented its processes. Company president Mary Isbister realized the organization would benefit from having standard procedures in place and turned to the Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership (WMEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, for help.

Solution:

WMEP led General MetalWorks through the registration process for the ISO 9001:2000. "ISO 9001 is a management system that defines the minimum requirements for a business," said Rick Goodson, WMEP portfolio/project manager for General MetalWorks. "Most viable businesses already meet 70 to 75 percent of what's in the standard. The newest revision level (2000) relies less on documentation and instead emphasizes your business's processes as your customers see them and as you see them. It leaves it up to you to decide how much documentation you need in order to define your processes." WMEP and MetalWorks identified the processes they needed to document and identified people to own those processes. They also established metrics to track the efficiency of the processes. With their order entry process, they began measuring how long it took to enter orders, since sometimes orders arriving late in the day were not entered until the next day, costing them a day of lead time. They established a maximum time of one day to get orders into the system and are now in the process of shortening that metric. They also examined their subcontractor purchasing process and began tracking vendor delivery performance to improve lead times. The work to define the processes and their metrics increased ownership of the processes. Previous work to establish procedures was done by a consultant, but the procedures were not implemented by the company because employees were not involved in their development. By establishing both procedures and metrics, people began to see that they could have a direct effect on the change. The ISO work also broke down the barrier that often exists between production and the administrative personnel. "By having metrics and demonstrating continuous improvement on both sides, people understand that this whole company is only as strong as our weakest link," said Isbister. "The work has resulted in an unexpected side effect -- a team culture where people can see how all the processes are linked."

Results:

* Achieved ISO 9001 certification.

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- * Increased sales by \$4.8 million.
- * Exceeded goal of 99.5 percent defect-free parts.
- * Decreased shipping errors by 67 percent.
- * Increased business by 25 percent per year.
- * Reduced finished goods inventory by 94 percent.
- * Reduced raw stock inventory from 6 weeks worth to 3 days.
- * Reduced lead time by 64 percent.

Testimonial:

"I truly believe in WMEP and their mission and what they provide for businesses like mine. The WMEP manufacturing specialists care about the business. They know us and our processes. I feel like they're part of my team."

Mary Isbister, President